

3. Developing Ideas and Research Questions

If your students are at the beginning of a research assignment and you want to give them guidance on developing a topic, refer to:

- Video: How to Narrow Your Topic
- Video: Framing a Problem
- Video: Getting Started with Wikipedia/Google
- Video: Transitioning from Google/Wikipedia
- Video: Thesis Statements

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Purpose

What is the purpose of research? What are the traits of successful researchers? Does research differ for short term vs. long term projects?

Topic Choice

What role does topic choice have on the success of your research? (And how do you define a successful research project in your area of study?)

ACTIVITIES

Research Project Plan

Students begin by creating an overall plan and timeline for a research project, doing so in a similar way as they would for a paper. Students can work in teams or small groups to choose and develop their topics, thesis statements, and research focus. They should look at topic areas, subjects, aspects, etc. Have team members review topics and brainstorm ideas, ways to narrow or expand topics, and potential problems with the topics. It can help to employ a sort of peer review effort, allowing students to “see” the topic selection process from a different angle.

Brainstorming #1

In groups, students can brainstorm topic keywords, synonyms, and related terms. This works well with just paper and a pen, but also with whiteboards or virtual spaces. Students may create mind maps of terms, with multiple students adding interpretations and observations.

Brainstorming #2

Organize students into groups of 4 or 5. Distribute blank paper or use a mind map or brainstorming template. Assign each group a topic, or allow them to choose their own. Instruct students to write the topic in the center of the mind map. Explain that they are to write down as many related topics or subtopics as possible. Set a timer for 5 to 10 minutes and allow the students to work. When time is up, ask them to discuss their ideas with the class. Alternatively, assign multiple groups the same topic, and during the discussion compare the ideas that the groups discovered. Explain to students that what they put into the mind map can be used to help them expand or narrow their research on a topic, or organize sections of their paper. Remind students that their list of search terms may change as their research process evolves.